

# Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget

Public Hearing Date: March 6, 2015

Genevieve Porter Eason, Wilton, CT

## Re: Proposed cuts to Regional Mental Health Boards

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Genevieve Eason and I am writing in opposition to the proposed cuts to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. **In particular, I urge you to continue funding the Regional Mental Health Boards (RMHBs).**

**The proposed cut of \$584,000 to the 5 RMHBs represents approximately 75% of their funding and would effectively close down the entire RMHB system. This would mean an end to grassroots needs assessment, community-based evaluations, regional coalition building, and representation of the community's voice at the state level.**

As a member of the Board of Directors of Southwest Regional Mental Health Board (SWRMHB) and a member of SWRMHB's Catchment Area Council, I have seen the great value provided by the RMHB system.

SWRMHB provides outreach and education, fights stigma, brings together a wide range of community members and organizations, and brings our region's needs straight to the Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services. It is the only organization representing consumers, family members, and providers of behavioral health services. It is the only organization ensuring the community's voice in oversight and evaluation of programs and services. We cannot afford to eliminate these vital functions.

Furthermore, if the Boards are eliminated, the state may save \$584,000 but it risks losing \$23,000,000 in federal funding, since the mental health and substance abuse block grants depend on the regional information collected by the RMHBs and the Regional Action Councils and on their participation in the State Planning Council.

**On a local level, with only one full-time staff member, SWRMHB works tirelessly to connect people and programs in order to meet needs and improve services. A partial list of accomplishments over the past year easily demonstrates the value of the state's \$121,202 investment in SWRMHB:**

- SWRMHB's Mental Wellness Month initiative reached 2400 people during October and provided referrals to 312 people in need.
- SWRMHB's Community Conversations on Mental Health engaged more than 200 community members in six hours of small-group conversations, consensus building, and action planning around mental health.
- SWRMHB coordinated 53 awareness-raising, training, and other activities during a single 30-day period for Mental Health Awareness Month.

- SWRMHB managed a project to develop and promote [TurningPointCT.org](http://TurningPointCT.org), a website to support teens and young adults (a high-risk group) in the search for mental wellness.
- SWRMHB is currently conducting a study to determine the barriers affecting consumer access to outpatient behavioral health services, particularly access to prescribers. This study follows up on the needs identified in the regional needs assessment and the Community Conversations on Mental Health.

I have seen first hand how many people SWRMHB is able to reach. In cooperation with SWRMHB and Wilton Congregational Church, I organized a training in Mental Health First Aid for the community. Participants included a librarian who works in teen services and often encounters kids who are struggling, the pastor and other staff members from the church, parents and family members of people with mental illness, and my own daughter, who struggled with anxiety and depression in high school and now would like to help others who feel the way she did for so long. We learned how to recognize signs of a mental health crisis and offer assistance. Just like citizens can save a life by learning CPR and First Aid, they can do the same with training in Mental Health First Aid.

Thank you for understanding the value of these critical functions in support of the mental health system.

Genevieve Porter Eason

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